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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2019  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9055  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7293  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5202  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3448  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5154  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0027  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0689  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4265  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9618  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6912  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0001  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001016

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: JVP: PLAYING IT CLOSE TO THE CHEST--FOR NOW

REF: COLOMBO 1006

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Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a meeting with PolOff, MP Vijitha Herath of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, the People's Liberation Front) offered guarded comments indicated the leftist-nationalist party was probably waiting for a more certain political climate to declare publicly its political intentions. Herath repeatedly underscored the need to abolish the Executive Presidency. He cited the economy and IDPs as central issues for the JVP, issues which he accused the GSL of largely ignoring. The JVP expressed great concern over recent rumors of U.S. prosecution for war crimes of Chief of Defense Staff General Sarath Fonseka, and possibly Defense Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, which could crush its election hopes. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION STRATEGY

¶2. (SBU) Herath told PolOff that the JVP was aiming for a new political era, which had begun with the recent positive results from the southern provincial elections. He said he had noticed a change in the political climate in the past several weeks. Nonetheless, Herath expressed frustration with Rajapaksa's refusal to abolish the Executive Presidency, citing the seventh clause of the UPFA's agreement with the JVP, reached in the run up to the last presidential election. Herath said the JVP's main election goal was to defeat Rajapaksa and do away with the Executive Presidency, which the JVP viewed as an obstacle to democracy.

¶3. (C) Herath argued the GSL was singularly focused on winning the upcoming elections at the expense of key issues and was disingenuous in its promises to abolish the Executive Presidency. He said that the JVP had not yet decided on its candidate, but offered that Fonseka and former Chief Justice

of the Supreme Court Sarath Silva were possibilities. When PolOff asked about a formal alliance with the UNP, he responded that it was not possible, but that an alliance at an unofficial level was possible: "fighting together, but marching separately." (NOTE: The JVP-led uprisings against the then-UNP-led government in the 1970s and 80s and the government's brutal response, as well as fundamental ideological differences, probably are the primary factors keeping them apart. END NOTE.) Herath opined that it was more advantageous to the JVP to hold parliamentary elections before Presidential elections.

#### IDPs, ECONOMIC GRIPEs

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14. (SBU) Herath said that the IDPs were a major issue in Sri Lanka and that the GSL's claim that it was waiting to release IDPs because of the need to demine was false. He said that the government could and should release more IDPs and that the government's continued detention of civilians was likely to lead to problems in the future. In response to PolOff's question why the GSL continued to detain civilians in the camps, Herath suggested that the GSL might view doing so as electorally favorable, or it could be that the GSL was just not focused on releasing IDPs. More generally, he said that people were upset that peace had not changed the security situation, adding that citizens were fed up with continued road blocks and security checks, which the JVP viewed as impediments to democracy.

15. (SBU) Herath pointed to economic problems, including the increased cost of staples, which most people expected to decrease after the war, as a sign that the GSL's focus was

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not on the issues that were important to voters. He accused Central Bank Governor Ajith Cabraal of quoting faulty statistics to paint a falsely rosy picture of the economy. The GSL overspent on the war and had not put together an effective budget, which was why they had not presented one to Parliament. Herath said that he had just returned from Batticaloa, where he witnessed the government's inability to provide promised compensation to civilians displaced from the war and for land it appropriated during the war.

#### FEAR OF U.S. PROSECUTION FOR WAR CRIMES

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16. (C) Herath acknowledged that Fonseka--who is widely believed to be considering running for president--could pull in a significant number of Sinhala votes, but stressed that Tamils and Muslims were unlikely to vote for him because of his past Sinhalese nationalist statements, as well as his role in the war. Notably, Herath asked PolOff about the recent report of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) questioning Fonseka. He appeared very concerned and asked whether the U.S. might not allow Fonseka to return to Sri Lanka, which would scuttle the JVP's election strategy, in which case he indicated the JVP was likely to protest in front of the U.S. Embassy. PolOff explained our position per official guidance.

#### COMMENT

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17. (C) In the wake of the United National Party's announcement of its United National Front alliance and the Tamil National Alliance's Tamil coalition, the leftist JVP is waiting for the dust to settle before publicly committing to an election strategy and choosing its political partners. The JVP has fought to remain politically relevant after its traditionally Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist message was overpowered by President Mahinda Rajapaksa's aggressive military prosecution and subsequent victory over the LTTE in May 2009. Rajapaksa managed to weaken the party further when Rajapaksa loyalists split off to form the National Freedom

Front in May 2008, leaving behind the traditional leftists. The remaining JVP members have grown increasingly frustrated with Rajapaksa's refusal to follow through on his promise to end the Executive Presidency and what they perceive as his lack of focus on important post-war issues.

BUTENIS